

# PEOPLE & THINGS

**N**OWHERE in the world, I imagine, is there a newspaper office so beautifully situated as that of "Le Figaro." On a summer evening at the Rond Point des Champs-Elysées, when the fountains wave their white scarves of water and the chestnut flowers lie thick on the scorched macadam, no windows could be more advantageous than those of the great newspaper which this year celebrates its centenary.

They form, in fact, a kind of superior café-terrace; but one that is not without its hazards. Bombs have been known to come sailing through the first-floor window; it is only forty years since the then editor was shot dead by the wife of the French Minister of Finance; and "Le Figaro," which in its earliest days was edited successively from an attic and from a cellar, had to remove in 1940 and 1941 to a four-roomed apartment in Lyons.

## Rouge et Noir

**A**t the present time "Le Figaro" has settled, under the direction of Monsieur Pierre Brisson, for a watchful conservatism; and François Mauriac, Georges Duhamel, and André Siegfried set a tone which is doubtless less erratic than that of the nineteenth-century "Figaro" of Zola and Théophile Gautier.

I can vouch, at any rate, for one eminently conservative detail: Monsieur Brisson's father, a famous journalist in his time, could never set pen to paper without putting on (so his son tells us) a gypsy-red working jacket. But alas! such is the march of uniformity that the editor of "Le Figaro" now dresses just like everybody else.

## After Rhee?

**A**n interesting situation is likely to develop in South Korea if—as I hear is now likely—President Syngman Rhee's health deteriorates to a point at which he can no longer fulfil the functions of his office.

The 78-year-old President has as Vice-President an enfeebled henchman, five years his senior; and for the moment it is his devoted Viennese wife, whom he met while presenting Korea's case to the League of Nations at Geneva in 1932, who acts more and more as his adviser, helpmeet, and mouthpiece. The choice of his eventual successor would seem to lie between his fiery but lightweight Foreign Minister and Acting Premier, Paik To Chin, and one of the able young generals in whom the South Korean Army is said to be enviably rich.

There is no doubt, meanwhile, that the President will resist to the last any suggestion that he should relinquish his authority.

## Justice for Poets

**T**HE great success of the Book Society has shown, since its earliest days, that there are many habitual readers who welcome a little expert guidance among the great mass of new books; and I imagine that there will be a warm welcome for the Poetry Book Society—a quite independent enterprise—whose object is to pro-

vide its members, each year, with four volumes of new verse. The publication of poetry is, in general, a form of financial suicide, and I hope that the new society, which has the backing of the Arts Council, may be of service not only to readers of poetry but to those who write, print, and sell it.

There is at least one now-famous living poet whose first volume is rarer than the First Folio; I hope that the jury of the Poetry Book Society will be able to guarantee, at any rate, a four-figure circulation for those poets who win their suffrage.

## To Paradise on Wheels

**T**HE vehicle reproduced below is not, as might be supposed, a modish play-cart of monolithic design. It is (if Hungarian archaeologists are correct in their assumptions) the oldest wheeled



carriage yet to be discovered in Europe. It was recently unearthed in the Budakalasz sand-pits, near Vac, some twenty miles north of Budapest, and is thought to be at least 4,000 years old.

More than 200 human graves have been excavated in these pits, and the official in charge of the work has advanced the theory that the little cart was placed in the grave in the belief that it would ensure for the deceased a comfortable journey to the next world. "Comfortable" is not, however, a word that would be applied on this side of the Curtain to the design of this particular vehicle.

## Gay Berlin

**I** HEAR from a friend in Berlin that Mr. Molotov and his aides have at any rate a climatic advantage over their neighbours at the Conference table—for the cold, during the last two weeks, has been of Siberian intensity. Four degrees below zero is nothing uncommon in Berlin; and in such conditions there is an added charm in the neon-lit doorways that lead to the two hundred and forty "Nachtlokalen" of West Berlin.

In East Berlin there have been vigorous efforts to tempt the visiting diplomats and newspapermen to spend their evenings under Russian auspices. Not only, I hear, is the East German Press Centre far more luxurious than its Western counterpart, but even on the severely dialectical Stalinallee there are two restaurants, the Budapest and the Warsaw, which conform to decadent bourgeois standards of good living.

Perhaps, however, it is the designing shopper, or dollar-happy Autolycus, who profits most from his sorties into East Berlin; for cameras, typewriters and Melissen china may be bought there at a small fraction of their price in the West, and I hear that photography, in particular, has become

immoderately popular among those privileged to cross the border in question.

## Words for Music

**T**HERE is no such thing, in this country, as a professional librettist. The authors of (let us say) "Aida" and "Die Fledermaus" were seasoned workmen: but the English opera-composer, having no such veterans to hand, must usually rely upon poets and novelists who happen to be disengaged at the time. (Even the lodger, in recent years, has been pressed into service.)

I hear, however, that for one of the new operas which it is to produce next season, Sadler's Wells has called upon a librettist who, though new to the task, is surely uniquely well placed for it: for Mr. Patrick Terry, who has written the text of "The Moon and Sixpence" (the theme is, of course, derived from Mr. Maugham's novel), is General Manager of the Covent Garden Opera Company, and it was actually in the Opera House itself that he and the composer, Mr. John Gardner, did much of the preliminary work. I shall be surprised, therefore, if "The Moon and Sixpence" does not show that practical sense of the theatre which is so often lacking in English opera.

## Safety in Numbers

**F**OR those who, like myself, have a particular taste for information that is presented in the form of statistics, the past week has been uncommonly rich. On Monday, I learnt that one in every 500 French adults has written a novel in the past year; on Tuesday, that one in eleven of every audience in the Royal Festival Hall lives in Surrey; on Wednesday, that one in every ten letters posted in England is connected with football pools; on Thursday, that the play which ran for only one night at the Duke of York's Theatre has grossed 52,324,510 francs in its original French version.

To the amateur of statistics these figures have a vivid pictorial interest. As I write these words, I see the lights going out over Godalming as the pleasure-crazed populace heads for Waterloo; in Eze and Conques and Caïs and Caen the typewriters rattle like small-arms fire; and as they pad towards the letter-box the permutationists sniff one another at a hundred yards.

For the true addict, no figure can be too trivial: I was even delighted, when lunching on Friday at a restaurant near Leicester Square, to receive a printed card with the information that I was then sixty-two yards from London's foremost billiards saloon, sixty-nine from one of its smallest cinemas, and nine and a half from my favourite picture gallery. Nine and a half! There, I decided, lay the genuine demoniac touch.

## Many a Slip

**T**WENTY years ago the phrase "a slipped disc" would have signified, if anything, a trivial mishap in a recording studio. Today it is, of course, the accepted name for one of the commonest and most painful of afflictions. In this, however, as in all else, times change; and I hear that the well-informed sufferer now defines this complaint as "a facet syndrome."

As for his symptoms, they are no longer lumped together as "pains in the back." *Synovia nippings* are the mark of the facet syndrome; and the slipped disc is back where it belongs—on the gramophone turntable.